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ABSTRACT

The apparent lack of preparation of many young adults for their future roles in society has been a frequent criticism of our public school system. In response to such criticism, Madison East High School of the Madison (Wisconsin) Metropolitan School District has implemented an innovative program of study called Walkabout. The goal of the Walkabout program is to better prepare students for their future roles as adults in society. To accomplish this the Walkabout model focuses upon experiential learning and decision making by the student. This paper describes the development of the Walkabout program into a practicable educational experience at the high school level. The student, with parental consent and counsel by staff, designs a series of individual learning experiences to meet challenges in the following five broad areas: logical inquiry, service, practical skills, creativity/ aesthetics, and adventure. A t-test calculated for attitude questionnaires was administered to participating students. It indicated a significant improvement in students' attitudes toward school. (Author)

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WALKABOUT: An Educational Program Preparing Young Adults for the Future

Alan L. Roecks

Nancy J. Scott

Michael R. McArdle

George H. Shands

Frebert K. Dams

Rose G. Sluzas

East High School
Madison Metropolitan School District
Madison, Wisconsin

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WALKABOUT

An Educational Program Preparing Young Adults for the Future

Alan L. Roecks
Nancy J. Scott
Michael R. McArdle

George H. Shands
Frebert K. Dams
Rose G. Sluzas

Madison Metropolitan School District

Abstract

Walkabout is a voluntary, self-contained, individualized, interdisciplinary program both consummating the high school phase of a person's life and opening the door to adult society. It helps form a crucial link between minor dependency and the attainment of adult independence and self-direction by helping the student develop the sensibilities, knowledge, attitudes, and competencies so necessary for a full and productive adult life.

The Walkabout model, developed by Maurice Gibbons (Kappan, May, 1974), focuses upon experiential learning and decision making by the student. To accomplish this, the student, with parental consent and with counsel by staff, designs a series of individual learning experiences to meet challenges in the following five broad areas: logical inquiry, service, practical skills, creativity/aesthetics, and adventure.

This paper describes the development of Walkabout at Fast High School, Madison, Wisconsin. In the first year of the pilot program (last quarter of the 1974-75 school year), seven students attempted challenges in three selected areas. In the second year of the pilot program (during the second semester of the 1975-76 school year), twenty-four students attempted challenges in all five areas.

Background

The apparent lack of preparation of many young adults for their future roles in society has been a frequent criticism of our public school system--particularly at the secondary level. In response to such criticism, Madison East High School of the Madison Metropolitan School District in Madison, Wisconsin has implemented an innovative program of study called Walkabout. This program has been coordinated by Project East, a Title III, E.S.E.A. effort. The goal of the Walkabout program is to better prepare students for their future roles as adults in society. The purpose of this research is to describe the development of the Walkabout program into a practicable education program at the high school level. A complete handbook detailing how to implement such a program is available upon request. An order form is provided on the last page of the report.

The Walkabout concept was introduced into the educational circles by Maurice Gibbons in the May, 1974 edition of Phi Delta Kappan. Gibbons took the title, "Walkabout," from a movie about a practice among the aborigines of Australia which requires young warriors to complete a six months long endurance test during which they must survive in the wilderness. If they survive they then return to their tribe accepted as an adult. Gibbons claims that in America, by contrast, our youth are faced with written examinations that assess academic skills rather than skills useful in adult life. He further notes:

> He is under direction in a protected environment to the end; he does not go out into the world to demonstrate that he is prepared to survive in, and to contribute to, our society. His preparation

is primarily for the mastery of content and skills in the disciplines and has little to do with reaching maturity, achieving adulthood, or developing fully as a person.

For his Western counterpart, however, school always is a crowd experience. Seldom separated from his classes, friends or family, he has little opportunity to confront his anxieties, explore his inner resources, and to come to terms with the world and his future in it.

Within this framework, Gibbons postulates guidelines for developing a Walkabout challenge appropriate for students in contemporary American society which are as follows:

1. Service: a challenge to identify a human need for assistance and provide it; to express caring without expectation of reward.

2. Practical Skill: a challenge to explore a utilitarian activity, to learn the knowledge and skills necessary to work in that field and produce something of use.

3. Logical Inquiry: a challenge to explore one's curiosity, to formulate a question or problem of personal importance, and to pursue an answer or solution systematically and, wherever appropriate, by investigation.

4. Creativity: a challenge to explore, cultivate and express his or her own imagination in some aesthetically pleasing form.

5. Adventure: a challenge to the student's daring, endurance, and skill in an unfamiliar environment.

The remainder of the paper details how the concept was implemented at the high school level. The next section discusses the planning stages of this effort.

Planning and Design

In the summer and fall of 1974, Walkabout was discovered and discussed by a few staff, parents and students of East High School. Interest in the concept increased to the point that the originator of the Walkabout concept, Maurice Gibbons, was invited to visit the school in October, 1974. Following Dr. Gibbons' visit, the Walkabout concept was formulated into an educational pilot program by a committee of staff, students, and parents. The committee discussed and debated the problems of trying the idea in a traditional high school setting.

Academic course credit, legal problems, and the financing of Walkabout were issues of concern. The recommendation of the Walkabout committee, which was later adopted as school policy, was that a student would receive equal credit for each of the five contracted and successfully completed Walkabout challenges. A student's involvement in Walkabout would comprise their entire coursework for one semester. Before beginning their Walkabout, requirements for successful completion of each challenge would be identified. This would be done jointly by the student, Walkabout staff, the community resource person who would be working with the student during the challenge, and the parent(s) of the Walkabout student. The process by which the student was to be graded would be determined during these planning sessions.

The Walkabout committee sought to anticipate and forestall the potential legal problems inherent in any program where students are away from school for extended periods of time. A tenuous solution was agreed to by having the student and parent(s) sign a notarized consent form allowing the student to participate in the Walkabout program. Walkabout staff, students, and parents also would meet to discuss potential hazards

that could be avoided by students taking reasonable precautions.

The financing of Walkabout involved determining the costs and payment of those costs. During the test runs, these costs would be paid by Project East, a Title III E.S.E.A. project, located at East High School.

Field Test

Field testing during the spring of 1975 gave the school an opportunity to study the feasibility of incorporating the Walkabout concept into the educational program at East High School. The three staff members, George Shands, Frebert Dams and Rose Sluzas who had written the proposal, worked with the seven participating students and coordinated the program. These students each attempted three challenges during a nine week period.

On the whole, the field test proved to be successful. Analysis of the two questionnaires given to Walkabout students indicated that students' attitudes toward school had improved significantly, $t(6) = 2.11$, $p < .05$, and their perceptions of their involvement in the learning process had also significantly increased, $t(6) = 1.71$, $p < .10$. Student reaction sheets revealed many positive aspects of Walkabout.

The results of the field test and an operational test proposal were reviewed by East High School's Walkabout committee, student senate, faculty senate, departmental chairpersons, Parent Teacher Association members, and Long Range Planning Committee. This review process helped to inform the school about Walkabout.

Operational Test

The operational test of Walkabout was held during the second semester of the 1975-76 school year. Twenty-four students each attempted five challenges during the eighteen week semester. Examples of challenges are given by Figure 1 on the following page.

Figure 1

Examples of Walkabout Challenges

PRACTICAL SKILL

- Beginning a musical instrument (piano, guitar, flute, recorder)
- Beginning photography
- Building a model house; figuring the cost of a full-scale one
- Learning how to work with emotionally disturbed children
- Learn speed reading & comprehension
- Learn a foreign language (Spanish, French, etc.)
- Build furniture (chair, table waterbed, etc.)
- Make a quilt
- Build a canoe

CREATIVITY/AESTHETICS

- Advanced music involving interpretation & creative expression (any instrument, composing music)
- Jewelry design and fabrication
- Advanced photography
- Design and make articles of clothing
- Create a woodcarving
- Write an original play; compose poetry - stage the play; recite the poetry.
- Write a TV comedy; videotape it and show it

SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY

- Teaching assistant in elementary or middle school (Sandburg, Sherman, Gompers, Marquette, Lowell)
- Serve in a hospital or lab (lab work in Neuropsychology)
- State Historical Society (catalog items, etc.)
- Help construct the Wis. Ice Age Trail
- Work on Ch. 21's (WHA-TV) auction
- Assist at a church or synagogue
- Teach a class (poetry at Sherman and Gompers)
- Be a dispatcher with Women's Transit Authority
- Work with the Common Market Coop
- Work with the Red Cross

ADVENTURE

- Hike to Lacrosse and back--alone!
- Backpacking (Smoky Mt. Natl. Park, Porcupine Mts. in Upper Mich., Zion Natl. Park, etc.)
- Plan and execute a solo trip to a foreign country (Germany, Nicaragua).
- Plan and execute a trip related to another challenge (New Orleans).
- Work on developing a trail in the Rocky Mts. (Colorado)

LOGICAL INQUIRY

- Study the animal and plant life of a marsh. Display examples or photographs with written description
- Compare two or more marshes in the Madison area through research
- Research and write a paper on China since 1949
- Research and write a paper comparing the historical development of architecture in Madison.
- Study the concepts behind various types of meditation. Learn to do one type
- Study nutrition and give a talk on the values of good nutrition
- Research and write a paper on some Biblical theme
- Take a course at the U.W., MATC, or another high school (psychology, electronics, minority lit)
- Compare concepts of major philosophies.

The results again proved quite positive. A t-test was calculated for the attitude questionnaires completed at the beginning and at the end of the Walkabout semester by the Walkabout participants. This test indicated a significant improvement in students' attitudes toward school ($t = 2.8$, $df = 18$, $p < .01$) and in students' perceptions of their participation and involvement in the school program ($t = 5.4$, $df = 18$, $p < .001$). Strong student support of Walkabout was again revealed in comments from the student reaction sheets.

In June, 1976, the same groups which reviewed the results of the field test examined the operational test results. Walkabout was recommended for incorporation into the educational program of East High School and for funding by the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Walkabout is presently in its third year of operation at East High School.

For those wishing additional information, the Walkabout Handbook which details the complete process of designing and implementing this program is available upon request from:

Project East
Madison East High School
2222 East Washington Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53704